AusIMM

Report: Regional Development Policy Forum

Melbourne, Thursday 6 August 2026



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About AusIMM

The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMM) is the peak body and trusted voice for professionals working in the resources sector.

We advance careers, inspire leadership, uphold standards and connect communities.

AusIMM was founded in 1893 and operates under a Royal Charter. We have a global community of members, branches and societies, along with influential partnerships with industry, government, universities, research institutions and community leaders.

In 2024, we were named Association of the Year for demonstrating our impact on the global resources sector, delivered through world-class professional development and connection for our thriving community of members and resources professionals. Representing a community of more than 16,000 professionals working across 110 countries, our members are active at all levels of the sector, in fields ranging from engineering and geoscience through to processing, manufacturing, environmental management and social performance. Our members provide leadership across industry, government, research and academia.

We fulfil our purpose to advance resources for the community's benefit through our role developing and upholding technical standards, developing professional skillsets and convening the experts and thought leaders who make up our community to shape policy and provide balanced, credible insights on the scientific, technological, social and economic contributions our sector makes worldwide.

The Regional Development Policy Forum discussed in this report is part of a broader Forum initiative that is core to our research, policy and advocacy role. The initiative brings together subject matter experts to provide specific and actionable recommendations on the strategic priorities that are defining the future of our sector and its role in contemporary society. The environmental, social and governance leadership of our professional community is core to the role we play advancing resources for the benefit of the broader community.

We focus, across this program, on areas including the role the sector plays in both developing and utilising science, technology, engineering and mathematics skillsets; delivering positive environmental, social and governance outcomes; and enabling the development of advanced industry in energy, defence, technology and other fields.



Executive Summary

The Regional Development Policy Forum hosted in Melbourne on 6 August 2026 brought together representatives from the resources sector, government, universities, research organisations, and AusIMM leadership to identify priorities for lifting regional social, economic and industry development capability in Victoria's critical minerals sector.

The Forum tested how lessons from AusIMM's research partnership with the Queensland Government apply in Victoria, focussing on local social, industrial and land-use dimensions. Delegates considered capability from three connected perspectives: the resources sector; local, state and federal government; and communities, Traditional Owners, land users and adjacent industry. Discussion focused first on current gaps in skills, systems, governance and performance, and then on the enablers required to strengthen and demonstrate capability.

Crucially, the outcomes from the Melbourne Forum build on a series of research, policy, professional development and governance programs led by AusIMM peers to enhance development outcomes across the sector. These include the Queensland Government partnership, which investigated the perceived, desired and demonstrable capability of the state's critical minerals sector.

The findings from this partnership are included in the Further Reading section of this report.

AusIMM is also the custodian of key industry codes and standards, contributes to the development and local application of global sustainability frameworks, and delivers professional development and engagement through our education, conferences and professional communities.

The central conclusion of the Melbourne Forum was that regional development outcomes in the Victorian critical minerals sector are a function of individual capacity, corporate strategy, government and community participation, effective governance and regional integration – ultimately mediated through the professionals with expertise and accountability across these domains.

We table the key findings and specific recommendations flowing from our engagement on the day in this report.



Boosting environmental, social and governance capability to advance Victorian resources

In practice, the value and viability of Victoria's prospective critical minerals projects rests on local mining histories, regional economic conditions, community expectations, land-use pressures, project maturity and the capacity of smaller proponents to engage and partner effectively with stakeholders across a broad ecosystem.

This central conclusion demonstrates that many of Victoria's opportunities, expectations and capability uplift needs refare consistent with those identified in the Queensland context, albeit with certain skillsets being more or lesssalient based on local conditions. Ultimately, a nationally coherent suite of principles, competencies and uplift mechanisms will deliver the greatest impact for the sector and our partners, and this is the fundamental premise of the work led by AusIMM as the sector's peak professional association.

Regional coordinations for critical minerals developments, especially to integrate mining within a broader set of active and future land uses, was one of the key priorities defined through both the Queensland Partnership and Melbourne Forum.

Delegates to the Melbourne Forum identified the following priorities to benchmark and lift ESG capability for Victoria's critical minerals sector:

1. Establish an appropriate regional coordination authority, or empower an existing agency within the State Government, to:
    a. Coordinate regulatory processes with Local and Federal counterparts
    b. Engage industry, investors, community, and infrastructure providers interested in future critical minerals developments.
    c. Plan benefit sharing, regional development, coexistence and post-mining land use as part of a single process.
2. Develop project governance systems – and commercial and finance models – that integrate regional benefit sharing and contribute to socio-economic development.
3. Establish a public information portal with consistent, accessible and clear information on most salient matters, including environmental, infrastructure, socio-economic and land use data. Datasets built around regional area should have contributions from industry, government, community and First Nations representatives.



4. Couple the establishment of this dataset with practical training and materials to ensure community, industry, government and other parties have the agency and information needed to participate fully in decisions and projects that affect their interests. This includes developing and interpreting their own evidence on the benefits and impacts of future development.
5. Build resources literacy and practical capability across smaller operators, local government, communities and aspiring project developers through case studies, guidance, peer learning, cross-regional training and competency pathways.
6. For Victoria specifically, undertake detailed engagement with local stakeholders to define key interest areas (such as environmental management and infrastructure delivery) and adapt a capability uplift matrix and program based on the Queensland model. While the blueprint developed for Queensland has direct application in Victoria, the relative saliency of interests, capability gaps and uplift mechanisms needs to be defined locally.
7. Build trust through practical demonstrations, including transparent rehabilitation reporting, credible case studies and collaborative trials that allow industry, government and communities to test and share better approaches.

The subsequent sections capture the discussion and reasoning behind these priorities. The findings will inform AusIMM's advocacy, professional standards, competency and capability uplift programs, especially including planned engagement with Victorian stakeholders on critical minerals development, regional planning and social and environmental performance in the state. Forum to be hosted with the Australian Mining and Automotive Skills Alliance (AUSMASA) in September.



Forum Context and Discussion

Critical minerals are central to clean energy, technology and advanced industrial value chains around the world. Increasingly, our sector plays a vital role as a trusted supplier the minerals, materials and expertise necessary not only to generate a direct economic return but also to support downstream industry and underwrite Australia's strategic and trade relationships with global partners.

In this context, the opportunity to deliver positive socio-economic outcomes through the expansion of our domestic critical minerals sector is compelling. This is especially true given the role minerals development can play as the anchor for advanced industrial hubs, where production is combined with processing, refining and other manufacturing. This is particularly salient in Victoria, where the opportunity to introduce innovative, productive and beneficialpost-mining industry at various stages along the broad critical mineral value chain is a key opportunity for both existing and prospective mining regions. Indeed, the key opportunity is to deliver this activity through a place-based approach, where Victorian industry forms a central part of of integrated domestic and international production chains.

Ultimately, the long-term contribution critical minerals make to regional development depends on more than resource potential.

Projects must demonstrate strong environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance, partner with host communities and Traditional Owners, and collaborate with non-minerals industry partners if they are to maximise their public-interest impact. ESG performance is vital to de-risk projects, even as the prospects for oft-vaunted ESG premiums on global commodity markets remain unclear.

AusIMM's Queensland capability analysis has found strongest performance in areas supported by mature regulation and established systems, and lower capability in circularity, traceability, decarbonisation, climate adaptation and regional governance. We have also identified practical mechanisms to uplift capability, including through knowledge sharing that focusses on real-world case studies, peer learning, targeted guidance, technical competency mapping and a centrally managed information hub accessible to all stakeholders.

Our work has also demonstrated the absolute imperative to test, validate and calibrate these priorities with local stakeholders. While the broad framework of expectations, opportunities, enablers and competencies can be defined in general terms, their salience is determined locally.



Towards a Victorian Regional Development Capability Framework

The Melbourne Forum asked delegates to consider the current and future state of Victorian development, coordination, partnership and engagement capability from the perspective of the resources sector, government, and local industry and community stakeholders. We considered two questions across these stakeholder groups and canvassed the key themes in the sections overleaf.

Stakeholder	Current-state question	Enabler question
Resources sector	What are the gaps in ESG skills, systems, governance and performance?	What would support the sector to build and demonstrate ESG capability?
Government	What are the gaps in ESG regulation, planning, coordination and oversight?	How can ESG regulation, planning and coordination be strengthened?
Community and adjacent industry	What gaps constrain participation and benefit sharing across the project lifecycle?	What support would enable effective participation and shared decision-making?

Victorian capability is uneven and shaped by place

Delegates described capability across industry, government and community stakeholders as developing but inconsistent. Performance varies between regions and is influenced by local mining history, economic drivers and familiarity with resources development. In some locations, high community expectations have not been matched by a comparable uplift in capability, data and information quality or institutional and procedural confidence.

The cumulative impact of other major developments in the state, particularly electricity transmission projects, is seen as a substantial factor here for some communities, as is the perceived compatibility of mining and other primary industries, especially agriculture.

This variability matters because a single project will enliven regional planning, agricultural land, water, infrastructure, environmental assessment, social and post-mining land use factors. Delegates noted that planning narratives and institutional responsibilities are not always clear or mature enough to connect these issues. Confidence in returning land to productive use after mining remains low where industry and government cannot point to trusted examples.

The implication is not that Victoria requires an entirely separate capability framework. Rather, nationally coherent principles and professional expectations need to be translated into state and regional arrangements that reflect project scale, local land uses, mining history and community aspirations.



Regional coordination and cumulative impact planning are missing links

Forum delegates cited the gap between project-by-project decision-making and consideration of the cumulative regional effects of multiple developments. Delegates identified the need to connect resource planning with land use, infrastructure, workforce, water, environmental management, economic diversification and post-mining transitions. This is a task not only for government, but also for industry in the way it delivers early-stage exploration and project development engagement.

No single actor was seen as consistently performing the necessary orchestrator role. Local government has close community relationships but may lack mining knowledge, resourcing and clarity about its regulatory and advocacy roles. State agencies hold important planning and regulatory functions, but coordination across portfolios and levels of government can be difficult. Communities and Traditional Owners may be asked to participate repeatedly without the structures, information or support required to influence an integrated regional outcome.

Delegates therefore supported a strengthened regional convening function with clear authority, resources and processes. Existing regional development, natural resource management, catchment, coexistence and environmental bodies may provide useful foundations, but the coordination function should be clearly distinguishable from project regulation and capable of convening state and local government, industry, Traditional Owners, land users and community organisations.

Transparency must make information usable, not merely available

Delegates called for more transparent reporting of the environmental, social and economic information communities and planners need. Suggestions included shared or coordinated public information, accessible environmental assessment material, rehabilitation progress, benefit-sharing information, socio-economic data, workforce projections and mapping of water and infrastructure constraints.

The discussion also recognised that publication alone is insufficient. Communities and councils need support to interpret technical data, understand uncertainty and engage effectively with project proponents and government. Independent studies and community-generated datasets were raised as ways to strengthen legitimacy and address actual or perceived information asymmetries. A trusted information hub could combine standardised reporting with explanatory material, examples of good and poor practice, practical “how to” guidance and links to regional datasets. Standardisation should focus on information that supports community understanding, government planning and confidence that commitments are being measured consistently.



Capability gaps are greatest where resources and influence are limited

Delegates highlighted practical capability gaps among junior explorers and producers, local councils, communities and other industrial asset owners, which come to bear at the earliest stages of resource development. Smaller proponents may have limited access to experienced social performance, regional development, economic participation and multi-stakeholder facilitation skills. Expertise can also be scarce in the regions where engagement and implementation take place.

Priority skills for industry (in mining and beyond) include community communication, coexistence and sequential land-use planning, cumulative impact assessment, regional development, benefit sharing, locally grounded economic participation, engagement facilitation and the ability to connect investor or market ESG expectations with local requirements.

The preferred response was practical and collaborative learning. Delegates proposed case studies covering both successes and failures, cross-regional training (focussed on effective examples from mining and other industries), peer learning, capability mapping and guidance for aspiring project developers. Crucially, gaps in areas such as environmental management and project governance were seen as opportunities to develop regional workforces and professional skillsets. Demonstration projects and shared trials could allow proponents to de-risk new approaches, test what works and create a credible evidence base for broader adoption.

Participation requires legitimacy, reciprocity and support

Effective participation depends on more than consultation opportunities. Delegates emphasised the need to establish communication protocols early, enable difficult conversations and ensure stakeholders have the knowledge and support required to engage with technical and commercial issues. Community representatives should not be assumed to speak for every local interest, and formal institutions may not always hold the legitimacy or authority that project proponents assume.



For Traditional Owners, delegates emphasised that approaches to participation based on corporate and regulatory standards may not be appropriate in every context and will rarely be adequate. Delegates highlighted the need to support Traditional Owner organisations and Elders to develop their own value propositions and capability to participate in project governance and delivery, to recognise and appropriately value the time and expertise contributed, and to include younger generations in conversations about long-term aspirations. Critically, engaging with Traditional Owners needs to extend beyond registered native title bodies, which (while legitimate and essential in their own right) may not represent all First Nations individuals or interests within a given region.

Communities should also be supported to create and interpret their own evidence. Starting with local strengths and sources of pride, rather than defining a region only through problems or project impacts, can provide a more constructive basis for shared planning. Genuine reciprocity means that community knowledge changes decisions, not simply that it is recorded.

Benefit sharing must create value beyond the life of a mine

Delegates distinguished short-term project benefits from durable regional value. Employment, procurement, infrastructure development, local investment and compensation are important, but benefit sharing should not leave a community wholly dependent on an operation that will eventually close.

The Forum therefore connected benefit sharing with economic diversification, integrated land management, agricultural coexistence, and proactive planning for post-mining land use. Regional plans should make explicit how project benefits, shared infrastructure and capability investment contribute to a diverse economy and support future land use.

This also requires clarity about what constitutes a benefit and what represents mitigation or compensation for a negative impact. Transparent expectations and monitoring can reduce the risk that standard compliance activities are presented as discretionary community benefit.



Social performance should be designed and costed from the outset

Delegates questioned whether project feasibility work gives sufficient weight to the resources required for social performance, community participation and shared decision-making. Early engagement can be difficult to fund before a project has secured investment, yet delaying it creates risk, weakens relationships and can lock in technical choices before local knowledge is considered.

The Forum supported clearer guidance on the measures of successful social performance, reasonable investment expectations at different project stages, and how engagement and participation costs should be represented in feasibility studies. This should encourage proponents to treat social performance as a core project capability and risk-control function, rather than a communications activity added after major decisions have been made.

Delegates also urged real consideration of whether proposed mining techniques are appropriate to surrounding environments and land uses. Technical design, environmental context and social legitimacy are connected decisions.

Where to from here

Engagement with Victorian stakeholders at the Forum demonstrates not only that the project drivers for critical minerals are distinct from bulk commodities, where large-scale decades-long projects take place in major resource basins, but also that the factors shaping development opportunities and capability are determined locally – at the state, region, community and project levels.

The overarching capability framework AusIMM has defined through our work with the Queensland Government is relevant, and comprehensive, but the salience of different skillsets and professional competencies needs to be tested locally.

For AusIMM, our immediate priority will be to test and validate our capability framework across all Australian jurisdictions, while continuing to expand the detailed competency, standards and professional development framework we offer as the sector's peak body.

Collaborating with domain specialists in areas such as community partnership and social performance will be a key feature of how we progress this work, leveraging the breadth and expertise of our professional community.



Further reading

1. AusIMM and Queensland Government. Capability Partnership Summary Report.
2. AusIMM. Submission on Regional Development and Social Licence for Critical Minerals Projects (2026).
3. AusIMM. Post-Mining Land Use Policy Forum Report (2025).
4. AusIMM. Critical Minerals Research and Development Policy Forum Report (2025).
5. AusIMM Social & Environment Society. Competency Assessment Tool.

